The Christian News-Letter

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DEAR MEMBER,

I referred last week to the energy, resourcefulness and readiness for service of the people of this country in meeting the emergencies of the war. Evidence of these qualities is found in the latest report of the London Council of Social Service.[1] It is an inspiring account of what has been done by voluntary social agencies of all kinds, in partnership with the Government and local authorities, in promoting social welfare in shelters, carrying on the work of citizens' advice bureaux, making arrangements for communal feeding, and facilitating holidays for civil defence workers.

The report also has some important paragraphs on the future place of voluntary services in the national life. The requirements of war-time have brought about a closer partnership and greater interdependence between the voluntary and the statutory social services. Does this mean the coming into existence of a State social service? Are we entering on an important new stage in the familiar process by which social services initiated by voluntary enterprise pass under the control of the State?

THE VOLUNTARY PRINCIPLE

Voluntary service is a vital element in a sound society. In asserting this we must not identify the principle with the continuance of any particular form of voluntary service. It is always an open question whether this or that enterprise begun as a voluntary service cannot, as the demands increase, be carried on with greater efficiency by the State. A voluntary organisation may think that it is affirming a principle when it is in fact only defending its own vested interests, which may be an obstacle to social progress. There is no hard and fast line of distinction. A voluntary organisation may become rigid and mechanical in its working. Its growth as an organisation may smother its vital fires. With an income derived largely from public grants and an army of salaried workers it may acquire many of the characteristics of statutory services. On the other hand, the spontaneity of personal relations may find expression in services organised by the State.

The vital matter is to be alive to the fact that organisation and machinery, however necessary for certain purposes, impose limitations on the free and direct relations between persons. It is in these that human society finds its highest fulfilment. Large-scale organization has to deal with men in the mass and to treat them according to categories. It has to proceed by rules and regulations which restrict the possibilities of bringing to the individual the help which is needed in his unique case. Hence no extension of organised services can do away with the need and occasion for the spontaneous, unregulated service of individuals by individuals. The health of society depends on the uncalculating responses of persons to other persons.

The significance of this issue for to-day is admirably brought out in a recent lecture by Mrs. J. L. Stocks published under the title *The Victorians*.[2] She reviews the remarkable achievements of the Victorian age and finds that they were inspired by the intense

[1] 7 Bayley Street, Bedford Square, London, W.C.1.
[2] Manchester University Press, 8-10 Wright Street, Manchester, 15.

belief " that it is within the competency of the individual human being to promote reform and to achieve reform—and, further, that it is the definite moral responsibility of the individual to attempt to do so." With this belief she contrasts the attitude of many of the younger generation in our scientific, determinist age. She describes a meeting with a group of undergraduates, who were intelligent students of English literature, and who were convinced that all its great masters could be exhaustively explained as products of their economic environment. What troubled her was " not that they reached the conclusion that we are but puppets dancing to a predetermined tune, creatures of our time, creatures of our class, creatures of our occupations, with their ' interests ' and circumscribed horizons, but that they wanted to reach it and derived emotional satisfaction from having done so."

It is doubtless true that the Victorians' war against evil was to a large extent a guerilla war, that they often tinkered with symptoms, that they were apt to ask small questions and give small answers, and that they did not go far in fundamental analysis. But it is equally true that the scientific approach to the problems of society may lead to a kind of paralytic detachment in face of events which seem to be beyond individual control. The paralysis of the German intelligentsia in face of Nazism is an example. And it is only by recapturing the Victorian individual's " disturbing conviction of individual responsibility " that we can hope to escape a similar paralysis.

CAN ANYTHING BE DONE TO HUMANISE WAR?

Six months ago the Bishop of Chichester, basing his plea on the Pope's Easter message, urged in a letter to *The Times* that the British Government should make a declaration that it would refrain from night bombing, provided that the German Government would do the same. A similar proposal is made in an editorial article in the current number of *Christendom*[1] on the ground that this country now has, or may shortly expect to have, preponderance in the air. We are consequently in the position to inflict greater destruction than we receive and the Nazis know this.

The natural reaction to the changed situation is to say, " Good ; we shall now give it them back." But first thoughts are not necessarily right. Is it possible that an opportunity has presented itself of doing something during war to create that more humane order for the sake of which the war is being fought?

The question is not one to be lightly brushed aside. If we are fighting the war to preserve the values of civilisation, we must save as much as we can of them even in wartime. I wrote a fortnight ago of what Grotius was able to achieve within the field of international law in an age of wars. It is a mistake to think that our standards of civilisation and instincts of humanity can be held in suspense during the war to be applied when it is over. To-morrow grows out of to-day, and what we can do with to-morrow depends on how we act to-day. To get used to war, and to accept as a matter of course all that is done in it, is moral death. "When we saw Churches and hospitals and the simple dwellings of the poor burnt and blasted," says the writer in *Christendom*, " and their occupants with them, we cried out that here was barbarity, here was outrage, here was a hideous set-back to such civilisation as Europe had attained; and we were perfectly right. We were not crying because we were hurt, but because humanity was shamed." But if it was, indeed, outrage, it is not less outrage when it is inflicted by us on Germans.

There is also an argument of expediency. Against any military disadvantage that might result from the cessation of night bombing must be set the psychological and moral effect on public opinion. Its abandonment on the initiative of this country would stand forth as an act of sanity in a lunatic world ; a creative deed, restoring, as no words can do, men's faith in humanity and mercy. It would prove to the world that the military strength of Great Britain is being used in the interests of the common people, and re-

[1] Basil Blackwell, Oxford. 2s. Annual subscription, 7s. 6d.

awaken hope in the hearts of disillusioned men. These are gains which no wise government will treat lightly. As in politics magnanimity is often the highest wisdom, so even in war the larger and more far-seeing view may prove to be militarily the most advantageous.

The case is an impressive one, but there are also arguments on the other side. In war military considerations are paramount. (This is neither an excuse for the infliction of suffering beyond what strict military necessity requires, nor does it imply that psychological and moral factors can be left out of account.) Lord Halifax said in a recent speech that only by an overwhelming attack from the air can conditions be created in Germany which will enable the war to be brought to a speedy conclusion, and that the steady bombardment of Germany is the best method of relieving the strain on the Russians. If the rate of loss makes day bombing too expensive, bombing military targets at night may be the only means by which this country can turn to account its superiority in this weapon of war.

It may be argued also that to wage war relentlessly on German soil is the only way of bringing home to the German people what the horrors of war, which they have without scruple or pity inflicted on other peoples, really mean, and that this can be done in present circumstances only through war in the air.

However eagerly we may long for a creative moral deed we must at the same time recognise that in the public sphere motives are more difficult to discern and more easily misinterpreted than in relations between persons. We have the reputation as a nation in the eyes of the Continent of investing with a high moral purpose courses that are to our political or military advantage. However sincere might be our motives, it might appear to others that in seeking the abolition of night bombing we were invoking Christian principles to protect our own homes, which the enemy cannot reach otherwise, while we remained indifferent to the far vaster devastation of homes on the Continent, and were content to do less then we might to weaken the power of the common enemy.

Nor can the argument that the senseless devastation caused by a night attack on a city by air is an outrage on our humanity be held, true and moving as it is, to decide the issue. War itself is an outrage, and its only justification is that there is no other means of warding off a still deadlier affront to our humanity.

But the question which we cannot escape, since life relentlessly confronts us with it, is at what point the means may defeat the end they are meant to serve. Hence it is right and necessary that the question about night bombing should be asked and earnestly weighed. If valid military reasons do not permit of an attempt to humanize war at this particular point, are there other ways in which we can affirm our humanity, even amid the necessities of war? Only if we allow ourselves to be tortured by such questions is there any hope of our being the kind of people who can establish the order of social justice and human fellowship which is our declared aim, and which multitudes of plain men and women ardently desire.

THE CHURCHES ON THE CONTINENT

Information about the Protestant Churches on the Continent is scanty but news occasionally filters through. A letter from a well-informed correspondent, whose identity cannot be disclosed, indicates that the external dangers and losses are bringing about an inner renewal. In Churches whose life seemed static there are signs of new vitality and movement. Where the voice of prophecy seemed to have died away, it is heard again in times of danger. Obstacles to reform which formerly were held to be insuperable no longer impede. The message of the Church is gaining the attention of those who up till now had been wholly indifferent, and a beginning is thus being made in bridging the gulf between the Church and those outside. People are being awakened to the fact that the Church is not simply a human institution which may crumble when the storm breaks,

but that its life is fed from hidden sources, from which in times of adversity it draws new strength. It is seldom possible in present circumstances to talk openly about the ecumenical movement. But the work of education and propaganda becomes less necessary when people are realising through their own experience that to be a Christian implies membership of the Church Universal and a community of faith and suffering with fellow-Christians throughout the world.

The Nazi pressure on the Church continues. By a recent decree the subject of religion must be taken off school reports. A number of the leading Church papers have been suppressed on the ground that men and material must be released for war work.

Reports have appeared in the press of a courageous stand taken by the Roman Catholic Bishop of Munster. He is said to have preached three sermons which have had a wide circulation and created a stir throughout Germany. He attacked the Gestapo by name and accused it of disrupting the national life, and boldly denounced the Nazi policy of putting to death the insane and incurable. He quoted a pastoral letter of the German Bishops in which reference was made to a volume, circulated in hundreds of thousands of copies, containing the assertion that Germans must make a choice between Christ and the German order. " With flaming protest," the pastoral letter declared, " we German Catholics deny that any such choice is necessary. We love our German people and serve them, sacrificing our lives if necessary, but at the same time we live and die for Christ." (The facts about this pastoral letter are difficult to ascertain. It has been denied that the message was a pastoral letter drawn up by the full conference of bishops. It has been quoted both as giving Catholic support to the German campaign against Bolshevism and as containing a bitter attack on the Nazi attitude to religion. It may very well be that both attitudes found expression.)

In Poland the German administration is increasing the severity of its measures for the extermination of the Polish nation. In the western areas incorporated in the Reich, out of nine bishops only one is left. Several bishops have been sent to the concentration camp at Dachau, and it is reported that a nun has been sentenced to twelve years of hard labour for obtaining food, to which the rationing regulations did not entitle her, for children and sick nuns in a night shelter. A recent issue of *The Tablet* contains a critical reference to the silence of the Vatican wireless on what is happening in Poland, in contrast with the outspoken references a year ago to the persecution of the Polish Church.

Yours sincerely,

J. H. Oldham

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